

## Taking Care of the Land, Water, and Air

The wind blows through the trees, rustling the leaves. It travels on, dodging obstacles, picking up the new and dropping the old. It travels farther and farther, collecting more and more. This gust of wind has been traveling since Earth's beginning, but as the years pass, it begins to feel a change. This change has occurred within, as the air is disturbed by pollutants. This polluted air reaches the lives of 103 million people who live in places where air pollution levels rose to unhealthy levels in 2006. Although the United States still emits air pollution, numbers have dramatically decreased. Since 1970, Americans have reduced air pollution by more than 50 million tons. But this is not enough.

The water trickles, flowing freely down a mountaintop creek. It flows on, a tributary to many lakes and rivers. The water is clear, but as it flows, it receives unlikely presents from Earth's inhabitants. The water is now cloudy and as it flows, it becomes murkier and murkier. This droplet of water has been around since Earth's beginning, flowing through the cycle of life, but as the years pass, it begins to feel a change. This change has occurred within, as the water is intoxicated by pollutants. This polluted water reaches into the veins of our oceans, disturbing the marine life and ruining one of our most precious natural resources. Pollution of fresh drinking is a problem for half of the world's population. Each year, there are about 250 million cases of diseases related to contaminated water, resulting in 5 to 10 million deaths. Eighty percent of the pollution in seas and oceans comes from land-based activities. Each year, plastic waste alone kills 100,000 marine mammals, 1 million sea birds, and an infinite number of fish. Although the United States still emits water pollution, many acts have been passed to decrease the effect of Americans on our planet's H<sub>2</sub>O. Public awareness has grown and led to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972. This act was amended yet again in 1977 and became known as the Clean Water Act. Also, the Great Lakes Legacy Act was enacted in 2002. But this is not enough.

The soil settles, securing all of the life around it. It journeys on, helping each object it reaches find nutrients and thrive. The soil is pure, but as it journeys, it is fed unhealthy herbicides and pesticides, and it becomes less and less fertile. This speck of soil has been wandering through the planet's green veins since Earth's beginning, but as the years pass, it begins to feel a change. This change has occurred within, as the soil is contaminated by waste and harmful chemicals. This polluted soil is feeding not only our fruit trees and vegetable plants, but it is also feeding the grass and grain which our cattle and livestock consume. An increase in urbanization has caused more of the land's natural resources to be used for construction and area for human habitat. Also, farmers have been using more machinery to work the land, enabling them to produce more and keep up with the demand. In addition, Americans use 50 million tons of paper annually, consuming more than 850 million trees. Every year, 24 million tons of leaves and grass are thrown away, accounting for 75 percent of waste in the fall. Now, measures are being taken to try and decrease the amount of wasted resources coming from the land and waste put into the land. Many people have made compost piles, which is an environmentally friendly way to get rid of leaves, as well as left over organic material, such as peels, cores, and skins of fruits and vegetables. Also, every ton of recycled paper saves 380 gallons of oil. But this is not enough.

As the wind blows, the water trickles, and the soil settles, our environment is in danger. More must be done, such as creating new and more efficient public transportation, which would cut down substantially on air pollutant emissions. New, modern-day water purifiers should be created to help tackle the heaps of sewage that are dumped into our freshwater rivers and our planet's once-clean oceans. Alternative fuels may not be one hundred percent eco-friendly because they still use a natural resource, such as coal or petroleum. A better way to decrease the use of these resources would be to cut back on the amount used by driving more fuel-efficient cars and by driving less. Not all of these

changes need to be made on a large scale. If 25 percent of American families used 10 fewer plastic bags a month, 2.5 billion plastic bags would be saved a year. If a central heating thermostat is turned down one degree, it can cut fuel consumption by 10 percent. If attics are insulated, energy loss in houses is reduced by 20 percent. If every shower had a water saving showerhead, the average amount of water used per minute would change from 5-8 gallons to 2-3 gallons. Each person living on this planet is responsible for their footprints left on Earth. These are a few ways to make these footprints lighter, but this is only the beginning.